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by Rev. R. Hodgson
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WESLEYAN METHODISM,

CONSIDERED IN RELATION

TO THE CHURCH;

TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED

A PLAN FOR THEIR UNION AND MORE
EFFECTIVE CO-OPERATION.

BY

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WESLEYAN METHODISM

CONSIDERED

IN RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

THE object of the present undertaking is to examine the relative position of the Church and the Wesleyan Methodists—the causes which led to their separation, as it existed in the time of Mr. Wesley, and, subsequently, under the auspices of the Methodist Conference—and the principles upon which that separation has been respectively attacked and defended. Assuming the character neither of an opponent nor an apologist, we shall conduct this examination with a strict regard to historical and documentary evidence ; and, should this examination lead to a favourable issue, we shall then take the liberty of proposing, in conclusion, some plan by which these two bodies may be brought into a state of more harmonious and, at the same time, more effective co-operation.

Neither can the present be considered as an inauspicious moment for opening such a discussion. In the absence of all agitating questions, whether civil or religious, we are left more at leisure to listen to

the “still small voice” of reason and reflection. To this may be added another favourable index of the times—a general tendency to test all theoretical principles by an appeal to their practical operation; and an admission, no less general, that the *organic* excellence of any Institutions can avail but little, unless seconded by an effective administration. Again, if “Truth be the daughter of Time, and not of Authority,” the lapse of a century since the origin of Wesleyan Methodism must have effected a considerable abatement in the virulence of those traditionary prejudices,—those “fictions of opinion,”—which substitute obscure phrases for rational conviction, and oppose an obstacle to the progress of truth and charity far more insurmountable than absolute and unmitigated ignorance.

In order to form a correct estimate of the conduct of individuals at any given period, we must view it carefully in connexion with the circumstances in which they were placed. What would be perfectly unjustifiable at one period, may become a matter merely of questionable propriety at another; and thus the *inclinatio temporum* — the “genius of the times,” becomes a beacon to warn and direct us in the application of our principles. This, then, is the doctrine of “expediency”—a sound and wholesome doctrine, not implying the sacrifice of our principles, but limiting or suspending their operation for the sake of some higher good to which these principles are confessedly subordinate. In other words, it is an

acknowledgment, that as there is a gradation of interests, so there is a gradation of duties—that sometimes the fulfilment of a higher duty involves the neglect of a lower—a maxim, the propriety of which our Saviour illustrated to his disciples when he proved to them that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

The nature of our argument precludes us from all necessity of entering into the character of our Church or the excellence of her offices; our business lies not with her internal economy, but her external administration. As we do not contend for the infallibility of the Church in points of doctrine, though, at the same time, holding her not to be in error [for there is a manifest difference between *not* being in error and *non-liability* to error]; so, on the other hand, we do not contend for *impeccability* on the part of those to whom the administration of her offices is committed. When we hear it acknowledged, on all hands, that, for many years past, a change has been gradually effected in the spirit of our Ecclesiastical Institutions—that the zeal of the national clergy has been awakened, and that they have begun to comprehend the object of their mission—to “train up a nation in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”—surely this acknowledgment implies the existence of an antecedent period, when their zeal was more quiescent, and the object of their mission was more imperfectly comprehended and fulfilled.

This, therefore, brings us to the consideration of

the point in question. The first branch of our inquiry necessarily embraces the state of the church, and the nation as connected with the church, at or about the period of Mr. Wesley's appearance. On this head we shall quote from writers of our own church, whose authority is, on all hands, admitted to be unexceptionable, and, to us at least, ought to be conclusive.

The period antecedent to that in which Mr. Wesley flourished had not been favourable to the moral and religious improvement of the people. The hopeful progress of the principles of the Reformation had been interrupted by the rise of the civil wars, and their genuine fruits had been blighted by the demoralising effects which the excitement of bad passions must necessarily produce. Neither was the case much altered for the better on the termination of the civil wars. Whatever political benefits might have accrued from the Restoration, certain it is that it brought with it no increase to the piety or even morality of the nation. The example of a dissolute court spread its influence among all classes of society—the Puritanism of a former age found its counterpart in the open licentiousness of that which succeeded.

“ Stulti, dum vitant vitia, in contraria currunt.”

The religious fanaticism of a preceding period afforded a plea for treating all pretensions to personal piety with contempt. Puritanism had been a caricature of Christianity, and it was, therefore,

necessary to obliterate the divine features of the original.

“Men,” says Archbishop Secker,* “have always complained of their own times, and always with too much reason. But though it is natural to think those evils the greatest which we feel ourselves, and, therefore, mistakes are easily made in comparing one age with another; yet in this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard to religion is become, through a variety of unhappy circumstances, the distinguishing character of the present age; that this evil is grown to a great height in the metropolis of the nation; is daily spreading through every part of it; and, bad in itself as any can be, must of necessity bring in all others after it. Indeed, it hath already brought in such dissoluteness and contempt of principle, in the higher part of the world, and such profligate intemperance, and fearlessness of committing crimes, in the lower, as must, if this torrent of iniquity stop not, become absolutely fatal.” †
 “But regard to piety is strangely lost even among persons that are otherwise tolerably serious. Many have laid aside all appearances of it; and others, who would seem to keep them up, do it with evident marks of indifference and contempt.” ‡

If such was the condition of the nominal professors of Christianity, we might easily anticipate the prevalence of infidelity among the educated classes,

* A.D. 1738.

† Eight Charges, p. 4. ed. 1790.

‡ Ibid. p. 21.

who were sagacious enough to detect what appeared to be paradoxical in the *opinions* of their opponents, and who made little scruple of avowing sentiments which met with no corrective from their *practice*. "It is come, I know not how," observes Bishop Butler,* "to be taken for granted, by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry; but that it is now, at length, discovered to be fictitious. And, accordingly, they treat it as if, in the present age, this were an agreed point among all people of discernment; and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals, for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."† The sunken state of Christianity during the civil wars, and the contests of embittered parties, were the proximate causes of English Deism; they precipitated the natural revulsion of overloaded reason to the opposite extreme of absolute scepticism. The writings of such men as Herbert, Hobbes, Toland, Blount, Collins, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Tindal, Morgan, Woolston, Chubb, and Bolingbroke, could not have been without their patrons and admirers; for there was not a single doctrine or evidence in the whole compass of Christianity which was not systematically sifted and exploded ‡

* A.D. 1736.

† Analogy. Advertisement prefixed.

‡ "Herbert, by substituting a natural theology for revealed doctrine, and by assigning man's natural instinct as the source of his knowledge of truth, the universality of the re-

“And all this,” remarks Bishop Gibson,* “was done under colours and pretences of several kinds. One, under pretence of opposing the encroachments of Popery, thereby to recommend himself to the unwary Protestant reader, has laboured at once to set aside all christian ordinances, and the very being of a christian ministry and a christian church. Another, under colour of great zeal for the Jewish dispensation and the literal meaning of Scripture, has been endeavouring to overthrow the foundations of the christian religion. A third, pretending to raise the actions and miracles of our Saviour to a more exalted and spiritual meaning, has laboured to take away the reality of them, and by that to destroy one of the principal evidences of Christianity. Others have shown a great zeal for *natural* religion in opposition to revealed, with no other view, as it seems, than to get rid of the restraints of revealed religion. And all or most of these writers, ception of those truths as the test of their being thus derived, laid a broad foundation for all the theories and criticisms of his successors. The distinctive character of the christian miracles had been disguised by Blount; the morality of the Gospel had been criticised from a false point of view by Shaftesbury; the evidence from miracles and prophecy had been separately (and therefore, as evidences, unfairly) judged by Woolston and Collins; the theory of Rationalism had been proposed with plausibleness, consistency, and soundness, though without depth, by Tindal.”—*Pusey's Historical Inquiry into Rationalism*, p. 124.

* A.D. 1728.

under colour of pleading for the liberties of mankind, have run into an unprecedented licentiousness, in treating the serious and important concerns of religion in a ludicrous and reproachful manner.”*

With respect to the national clergy, the descriptions left us by contemporary writers are perfectly consistent with the state of things just described. Bishop Burnet observes, that in his time “the clergy had less authority, and were under more contempt than those of any church in Europe; for they were much the most remiss in their labours, and the least severe in their lives.” In the preface to the third edition of his “Pastoral Care,”† he laments “the imminent ruin hanging over the church, and, by consequence, over the whole Reformation, and chiefly from the inward state into which we are unhappily fallen.” In reference to the clergy, he declares that the “Ember weeks were the burden and grief of his life,” that “the much greater part of those who came to be ordained were ignorant to a degree not to be apprehended by those who were not obliged to know it,” and that the “ignorance of some was such that, in a well-regulated state of things, they would appear not knowing enough to be admitted to the holy sacrament.” With a clergy so ill instructed as this, he asks, “What are we like to grow to? In what a case are we to deal with any adversary, Atheist, Papist, or

* Pastoral Letters, p. 2. 2nd Ed.

† A. D. 1713.

Dissenter ; or in any sort to promote the honour of God, and carry on the great concerns of the Gospel?" . . . " Clamours of scandal in any of the clergy are not frequent, it is true, and God be thanked for it ; but a remiss, unthinking course of life, with little or no application to study, and the bare performance of that which, if not done, would draw censure, when complained of, without ever pursuing the pastoral care in any suitable degree, is but too common, as well as too evident."

With a clergy whose acquaintance with theology was so defective it might easily be concluded that their sermons, as faithful exhibitions of christian doctrine, would be equally defective. The style of preaching prevalent in this age might, in fact, be denominated the *Ethical*, suppressing, in a great measure, the vital doctrines of Christianity, and forgetting that even morals, if disjointed from christian principles, can hardly attain a higher elevation than what they reached in the schools of the ancient philosophers—the Porch and the Academe. Something of this might, perhaps, be fairly ascribed to the great deistical controversies which agitated the age, and to a well-intentioned but over-anxious desire, on the part of the advocates of Revelation, to defend their positions, to the taste, and, if possible, to the conviction of their opponents,* who, like

* "Translations of our earlier English apologists did but aggravate the evil (in Germany) and increase the rational ten-

Tindal, conceived Christianity to be a mere "re-publication of the religion of nature," or, like Lord Herbert, "assigned man's natural instinct as the source of his knowledge of truth."

But whatever might have been the cause, the fact can hardly be disputed. The ethical style of preaching was equally prevalent among the "Orthodox Dissenters;" and the following quotation from one of their writers, who laments its prevalence, may be accepted as a fair description of its character. "The present modish turn of religion looks as if we began to think that we have no need of a Mediator; but that all our concerns were managed with God as an absolute God. The religion of nature makes up the darling topics of our age; and the religion of Jesus is valued only for the sake of that, and only so far as it carries on the light of nature, and is a bare improvement of that kind of light. All that is restrictively Christian, or that is peculiar to Christ; everything concerning him that has not its apparent foundation in natural light, or that goes beyond its principles—is waived and banished and despised; and even moral duties themselves, which are essential to the very being of Christianity, are usually harangued upon without any evangelical turn or reference to Christ, as

dency; partly because they had themselves been in some degree tacitly acted upon by the systems which they opposed," &c.
—*Pusey's Historical Inquiry into Rationalism*, p. 124.

‘fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God by him.’ They are placed in the room of Christ, are set up independent of him, and are urged upon principles, and with views, ineffectual to secure their practice, and more suited to the sentiments and temper of a heathen, than of those who take the whole of their religion from Christ.”*

If such were the facts of the case, it is a bare act of justice to the character and conduct of Mr. Wesley to state them; for it was from the sunken condition of Christianity within and without the church, that he was enabled to draw the principal weapons of his Apology. “How few,” he remarks, “are they who preach the truth as it is in Jesus, in comparison of those (οἱ καπηλεύοντες) who adulterate the word of God! How few are there that, either in writing or preaching, declare the genuine gospel of Christ, in the simplicity and purity wherewith it is set forth in the venerable records of our own church.”† Yet it was not an age rife with speculative error; and the attempts to revive semi-Arianism within the pale of the church, were promptly silenced by the masterly writings of Bull and Waterland. The great defect of the age was the decay of vital Christianity, a disregard for practical religion, and a contempt for religious ordinances. “If these crying enormities” observes Dr. Woodward, after a

* Twelve Sermons delivered at Coward’s Lecture, by Dr. John Guyse, p. 261. Ed. 1729.

† Wesley’s Works, vol. xi. p. 75.

long enumeration, "are public and common, and there be no power or authority, in church or state, put forth to stem or control them; such a nation or people will, without a miracle, first become a horrible scene of atheism and impiety, and then of misery and desolation."*

These authorities are amply sufficient to substantiate Mr. Wesley's statements; and, in fact, the admission has been made by a modern dignitary, whose position in the church is an adequate guarantee for his attachment to its interests. "Mr. Wesley," observes Bishop Coplestone, in a sermon preached in his diocese, "found thousands of his countrymen, though nominally Christians, yet as ignorant of true Christianity as infidels and heathens; and, in too many instances, (it is useless to conceal or disguise the fact,) ignorant, either through the inattention of the government, in not providing for increased numbers, or through the carelessness and neglect of those whom the national church had appointed to be their pastors."

Having thus seen that in the age, whose character we have been describing, the labours of Mr. Wesley were at least not supererogatory; we shall proceed to examine his "Irregularities," or that portion of his public conduct which involved a violation of church order and discipline. "The author and

* Collection of Sermons preached at the Boyle Lecture, vol. ii. p. 546. Ed. 1739.

founder of the Wesleyan Societies," remarks Bishop Coplestone, " (for he was careful himself to keep them from being formed into a sect,) was a regularly ordained minister, a man orthodox in his belief, simple and disinterested in his own views, and adorned with the most amiable and distinguishing virtues of a true Christian." It is therefore highly important to inquire under what circumstances, and with what views, Mr. Wesley was led to form a "fraternity within the church,"—adopting a discipline useful and supplementary, it may be, but still differing from that of the church, unrecognized by its ecclesiastical superiors, and exempt from their control and jurisdiction. Here, again, it will be necessary to consider the matter historically—viewing the successive phases of his "Irregularities" in a line parallel with the circumstances of the case, and the motives and convictions under which Mr. Wesley himself avows that he acted.

In the year 1720, Mr. Wesley, at the age of seventeen, was elected to Christ Church, Oxford, where he pursued his studies with very creditable success, and with that methodical zeal which so eminently characterized him in after life. According to his biographers, he devoted his hours of study, on Mondays and Tuesdays, to the Greek and Roman classics, historians, and poets; Wednesdays, to logic and ethics; Thursdays, to Hebrew and Arabic; Fridays, to metaphysics and natural philosophy; Saturdays, to oratory and poetry, chiefly composition; Sundays, to divinity. Mere

literary study, however, did not engross all his attention; and his mind was seriously impressed, during this period, by a careful perusal of several works bearing on practical religion, among which he specifies Bishop Taylor's "Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying;" Kempis's "Christian Pattern;" Mr. Law's "Christian Perfection," and "Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life."

It was not long before Mr. Wesley's impressions embodied themselves in action. Reflecting upon the advice of a friend, (whom he had travelled many miles to see,) that "he could not serve God alone, and that the Bible knew nothing of solitary religion," he was led, upon his return to Oxford, to form a small society, which numbered among its members Mr. Whitefield, the celebrated preacher; Mr. Hervey, the author of the "Meditations," and others. The objects of this association were chiefly practical—to assist each other in their studies, to promote each other's spiritual interests, to observe the fasts and attend the ordinances of the church with scrupulous exactness, to visit the sick and the prisoners in the common jail—for which latter practice, Mr. Wesley (on the advice of his father, which he had solicited) applied for and obtained the Bishop of Oxford's permission. This mode of life, not exactly according with the ideas and habits of their fellow-students, gave rise to much banter, and drew down upon them the appellation of "Sacramentarians," from their attending the communion weekly, and "Methodists," in reference, as is gene-

rally supposed, to an ancient sect of physicians remarkable for the strictness of their regimen.

This period of Mr. Wesley's life, therefore, calls for no comment. In his "Earnest Appeal to men of Reason and Religion," at a subsequent period, he thus alludes to it: "Those who, for many years, saw our manner of life at Oxford, well know that 'after the straitest sect of our religion we lived Pharisees,' and that the grand objection to us for all those years was the being righteous overmuch; the reading, fasting, praying, denying ourselves; the going to church and the Lord's table; the relieving the poor, visiting those that were sick and in prison, instructing the ignorant, and labouring to reclaim the wicked, more than was necessary for salvation. These were our open, flagrant crimes from the year 1729 to the year 1737."*

Mr. Wesley's attachment to a college life—partly, as he alleges, from the leisure and retirement which it allowed him, and the opportunities it afforded him of forming an acquaintance with congenial spirits, and partly from the comparative exemption which it secured from the "cares of the world," which, he was afraid, might check the progress of religion in his soul, [the proceeds of his fellowship being, at the same time, adequate for his support,] prevented him from acceding to his father's wishes to apply for the next presentation to the living of Epworth, and settle as a parochial

* Wesley's Works, vol. viii. p. 29.

minister. He who superintended, to the day of his death, societies which numbered eighty thousand souls, and, when "oppressed with the weight of seventy years, had generally blown the gospel-trump, and ridden sixteen or twenty miles, before most of the professors who despised his labours had left their downy pillow,"* was alarmed, at this period, at the idea of a sphere of action embracing the care of two thousand souls. "Two thousand souls! I see not how any man living can take care of a hundred: at least I could not; I know too well *quid valeant humeri*. Because the weight I have already upon me is more than I am able to bear, ought I to increase it tenfold?"

———— Imponere Pelio Ossam

Scilicet, atque Ossæ frondosum involvere Olympum?

. . . . Nay, but the mountains I reared would only crush my own soul, and so make me utterly useless to others."†

After the death of his father, which took place in 1735, no great length of time elapsed before Mr. Wesley was induced to go out as a missionary to Georgia; the regularity of his behaviour, his abstemious mode of life, and capability of enduring hardships, having recommended him to the notice of the trustees of that colony. In the year 1738 he returned to England, having discharged his labours, during this short period, with exemplary patience,

* Fletcher's Vindication, p. 96.

† Moore's Life of Wesley, vol. i. p. 221, 222.

in unpleasant circumstances. He had not yet attained, however, that serenity of mind which subsequently characterised him. He lamented that "he had gone to America to convert the Indians, but that he needed conversion himself." He acknowledged that for many years he had been tossed about with various winds of doctrine. Though "early warned against laying, as the Papists do, too much stress on outward works, or on a faith without works," yet, on the other hand, he acknowledges that he was utterly lost in the labyrinth of "some Lutheran and Calvinist authors, whose confused and indigested accounts (from their overgrown fear of Popery) magnified faith to such an amazing size, that it quite hid all the rest of the commandments."

Being a "little relieved from these well-meaning, wrong-headed Germans, by the English writers, such as Bishop Beveridge, Bishop Taylor, and Mr. Nelson," he subsequently investigated the *Consensus Veterum* as a rule of interpreting Scripture, on which point he subjoins some cautions not altogether inapt for the present period.* Afterwards, he became acquainted with

* "Nor was it long," he observes, "before I bent the bow too far the other way. 1st, By making antiquity a co-ordinate, rather than subordinate, rule with Scripture. 2nd, By admitting several doubtful writings as undoubted evidences of antiquity. 3rd, By extending antiquity too far, even to the middle or the end of the fourth century. 4th, By believing more practices to have been universal in the ancient church than ever

the mystic writers, " whose noble description of union with God and internal religion made good works, and even faith itself, appear mean, flat, and insipid." His perplexities were increased, but ultimately he came to the conclusion (the severity of which he afterwards relaxed) that " all the other enemies of Christianity were triflers—the Mystics the most dangerous of its enemies, stabbing it in its vitals; and by them its most serious professors were most likely to fall." *

On his return to England, Mr. Wesley met with Count Zinzendorf, who had visited this country in order to obtain the acknowledgment of the Moravian Church and the Church of England in Georgia as one church; and from one of the Moravian ministers (Peter Boehler) Mr. Wesley imbibed what were then considered his "peculiar" notions on "justification by faith." "Who would believe," remarks his brother, C. Wesley, "that our church had been founded on this important article of justification by faith alone? I am astonished I should ever think this a new doctrine; especially while our articles and homilies stand unrepealed, and the

were so. 5th, By not considering that the decrees of one provincial synod could bind only that province; and that the decrees of a general synod, only those provinces whose representatives met therein. 6th, By not considering that the most of those decrees were adapted to particular times and occasions; and, consequently, when those occasions cease, must cease to bind even those provinces."—*Ibid.*

Moore's Life of Wesley, vol. i. p. 342—344.

key of knowledge is not yet taken away. From this time I endeavoured to ground as many of our friends as came to see me in this fundamental truth, 'salvation by faith alone,'—not an idle and dead faith, but a faith which works by love, and is incessantly productive of all good works, and all holiness." *

As Mr. Wesley, on his return from Georgia, was attached to no particular cure, he preached in different places and to various congregations, as inclination might prompt, or the solicitations of friends might induce him. The novelty of his missionary character, the earnestness of his zeal, the persuasiveness of his eloquence,

"Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full ;"

and, above all, the peculiarity of his doctrine, "present salvation by faith," attracted the curiosity of the public, and rendered him popular as a preacher. This, however, was attended with unpleasant results. Exception was taken to the crowds attending his ministry, as leaving no room "for the best in the parish;" but the objections to his views of the doctrines of the Gospel were still more formidable. The consequence was, that he found himself excluded, not by "any judicial sentence, but by a general consent," from preaching in the churches; and the openly avowed reason was "for preaching *such* doctrine."

* Moore's Life of Wesley, vol. i. p. 274, 375.

Now, it is perfectly clear that Mr. Wesley had no right to a general occupancy of the pulpits of the National Church ; his admission to any church, where he was not attached to the cure, was a matter of courtesy, and, as such, might be refused with or without the assignment of a reason. It is perfectly clear, too, that the minister of a church, if bound by his subscription to adhere to "the form of sound words" himself, is also morally bound (by the maxim "*qui facit per alium, facit per se*,") to prevent his pulpit being made the vehicle of any other doctrines than what are recognised in the formularies of the church to which he has sworn fealty and allegiance. Those, therefore, who excluded Mr. Wesley from their pulpits, and chose to superadd their reasons, must be judged by their reasons ; whilst, on the other hand, the *validity* of those reasons must be left to decide the *propriety* of his exclusion. Not wishing to interrupt the continuity of our argument, we shall return to this point in the Appendix ; and, in the meantime, we shall take it for granted, that the doctrines of Wesleyan Methodism substantially coincide with those of the church.

Mr. Wesley's general exclusion from the churches only served to render him more popular at certain "societies," which, though not originating with him, existed in his time, and appear, for the most part, to have consisted of pious members of the Church of England. As the crowds increased, the want of accommodation began to be more sensibly

felt. Under these circumstances, and influenced partly by his previous habits as a missionary, and partly by the example of the celebrated Whitefield, Mr. Wesley was led to adopt the expedient of *preaching in the open air*. He acknowledges that this "irregularity" was, at first, a violent shock to all his preconceived notions of church order and discipline. "I could scarce reconcile myself, at first, to Mr. Whitefield's strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me the example on the Sunday (at Bristol); having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church."

For this practice, (which has now fallen into general disuse among the Wesleyan Methodists, from the erection of numerous and spacious chapels,) Mr. Wesley, in his "Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,"* offers the following apology: "After a time, finding that the rooms of the societies could not contain a tenth part of the people that were earnest to hear, I determined to do the same thing in England which I had often done in a warmer climate (Georgia), namely, when the house would not contain the congregation, to preach in the open air. This I accordingly did, first at Bristol, where the society rooms were exceeding small, and at Kingswood, where we had no

* Works, vol. viii. p. 112, 113.

room at all ; afterwards, in or near London." He declares that he had no idea of preaching in the open air till he was excluded from the churches—that as it was not an object of choice, so neither was it an object of premeditation, and that he did it in support of no ulterior schemes. "Field-preaching," he concludes, "was therefore a sudden expedient, a thing submitted to rather than chosen ; and, therefore, submitted to because I thought preaching even thus, better than not preaching at all : first, in regard to my own soul, because 'a dispensation of the Gospel being committed to me,' I did not dare 'not to preach the Gospel :' secondly, in regard to the souls of others, whom I everywhere saw 'seeking death in the error of their life.'"

Apart from all other considerations, Mr. Wesley, however, contended for the utility of the practice, declaring, that it brought him into contact with multitudes of poor wretches who were accessible in no other way, as they never frequented any place of public worship at all. "Had the minister of the parish preached like an angel, it had profited them nothing ; for they heard him not." He thought, however, that few competitors would contest with him the province of field-preaching, or submit to its inconveniences ; for, in addition to the inclemency of the seasons, he found himself exposed to "the contradiction of sinners, the scoffs both of the great vulgar and the small ; contempt and reproach of every kind ; often more than verbal affronts,—

stupid, brutal violence, sometimes to the hazard of health, or limb, or life.”*

This first “Irregularity” of Mr. Wesley was necessarily connected with another. As he was attached to no particular cure himself, and as his ministrations were not accepted in the pulpits of the national church—it is evident that his labours, as a minister of that church, must have assumed, in any parish, an *intrusive* and ex-parochial character. In the ordination of a priest, the exercise of the powers then conferred upon him is expressly limited to the “congregation where he shall be lawfully appointed thereunto;” neither can he preach or administer the Sacraments in any other congregation, unless the rector or curate desires his assistance: the only exception being in favour of Itinerants, licensed by the bishops and universities, who, however, cannot preach in any church till they show their license. (Canon 50.) We may pass over as untenable that ground of defence taken up by Mr. Wesley, when he says, that “he was not appointed at his ordination to any congregation at all, but was ordained as a member of that ‘College of Divines,’ (as our statutes express it,) ‘founded to overturn all heresies, and defend the Catholic faith;’”† for vague language, like this, can have no weight against consistent theory and uniform practice.

* Works, vol. viii. p. 230, 231.

† Works, vol. viii. p. 117.

But if Mr. Wesley was unfortunate in the theoretical part of his defence; his practical argument will require further consideration, because it is founded upon principles which we admit in common.* The theory of the church pre-supposes its ministrations, in reference to the external means of grace, to be commensurate with the spiritual wants of the people. But is this the fact? Is the practice consistent with the theory? The external means of grace might have been sufficient, in the time of Henry VIII, for a population of *three* millions in England and Wales; but are the same means of grace sufficient for a population that has been quintupled—a population of *fifteen* millions in 1840? Or have the means of grace been increased in a corresponding ratio with the population? †

* “ And here not only candour and equity, but a just sense of the constitution of Christ’s church, compels me to draw a marked line of distinction between those whose religious assemblies are *supplementary* to our own establishment, offering spiritual comfort to *hundreds unable to find it elsewhere*, and those organized communities which exclude from their society any that communicate in the blessed sacrament of the Lord’s supper with the national church.” . . . “ Of such, I repeat, wherever a like *deficiency* of religious means is found, we ought to speak not only with tenderness, but with brotherly love and esteem.”—*Bishop Coplestone*.

† From an Occasional Paper published by the “ Pastoral Aid Society,” we learn that out of 275 Incumbents relieved, 170 had under their charge a population averaging from seven to eight thousand each, or about a *million and a quarter* of souls!

It was upon this state of things that Mr. Wesley laid the stress of his argument; he contended that his labours were necessary to supply the "lack of service" in the church. In a "letter to the Bishop of London, (Dr. Lowth,) occasioned by his lordship's late charge," he thus states the case. "I would fain set this point in a clearer light. Here are, in and near Moorfields, ten thousand poor souls for whom Christ died, rushing headlong into hell. Is Dr. Bulkeley, the parochial minister, both willing and able to stop them? If so, let it be done, and I have no place in these parts. I go, and call other sinners to repentance. But if, after all he has done, and all he can do, they are still in the broad way to destruction, let me see if God will put a word even in my mouth. True, I am a poor worm, that of myself can do nothing. But if God sends by whomsoever he will send, his word shall not return empty. All the messenger of God asks, is $\Delta\omicron\varsigma\ \pi\omicron\upsilon\ \sigma\tau\omega$; (no help of man!) $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \gamma\eta\nu\ \kappa\iota\nu\acute{\eta}\sigma\omega$.* The arm of the Lord is revealed, and 'there is joy in the presence of the angels of God' over more than 'one sinner that repenteth.'

"Is this any annoyance to the parochial minister? Then what manner of spirit is he of? Does he look on this part of his flock as lost, because they are

Now admitting Dr. Chalmers's Theory, that one minister is adequate to a population of 2,000, the grand total, just given, would require 600 ministers!

* "Give me a point on which to stand, and I will move the earth."

found of the great Shepherd ? Those formerly enslaved to various habits of sin are now brought to uniform habits of holiness. These are demonstrable facts : I can name the men with their places of abode. One of them was an Atheist for many years ; some were Jews ; a considerable number Papists ; the greatest part of them as much strangers to the form, as to the power of godliness.”*

Irregular as this conduct might appear in the character of Mr. Wesley as a churchman, yet, if it had led to no other results, the consequences would have rested with himself ; and the question, at this distance of time, would have been one merely of biographical interest. But these irregularities almost necessarily led him (when we consider his methodical cast of mind) into the plan of forming distinct *Societies*, whose discipline was regulated and conducted under his own immediate and exclusive supervision. We believe that Mr. Wesley’s primary object, as he expresses it in his letter to Dr. Lowth, “ was not to proselyte any from one man to another, or from one congregation to another . . . but from darkness to light, from Belial to Christ, from the power of Satan to God ; ” and it may be charitably supposed that, in a mind so disinterested as his, the secondary means which he employed, were employed *bonâ fide* with reference to the attainment of his primary object. We may certainly concede the *sincerity* of Mr. Wesley’s conduct, and yet, at the same time, contest its *propriety*.

* Works, vol. viii. p. 494, 495.

Dr. Southey, in the *Sketch* of the Life and Character of Mr. Wesley, (which he inserted in the "Correspondent" in 1817,) appears hastily to have given sanction to the opinion which "represents Mr. Wesley as having early formed the project of making himself the head of a sect, and considers every part of his conduct as regulated by a settled and *preconceived* plan of ultimate separation from the church." Subsequently, however, in his "*Life* of Mr. Wesley," Dr. Southey (probably from a more careful examination of the facts of the case) admits that though the measures Mr. Wesley adopted, *tended* to a separation from the church, they were taken by him "in good faith;" that they arose out of the "circumstances in which he was placed, one step bringing on another;" and that in the outset of his career he had no intention of setting himself up in opposition to the Church of England.*

The Itinerant system, commenced by Mr. Wesley, and which subsequently became the legally established system of the connexion, afforded him frequent opportunities of observing the comparative effects of his ministry at different periods. To a mind naturally so reflecting as his, the suggestion very soon occurred that something more than preaching was requisite to render the good effects of preaching permanent. He observed that wherever he neglected to form "Societies," and to

* See Watson's Remarks on the Life of Southey, p. 124.

introduce christian fellowship—the effects of his preaching were only transitory, and that the generality of those who at first “received him gladly,” subsequently lost their good impressions and became lukewarm and indifferent. Whatever inconsistencies may be charged upon Mr. Wesley, it cannot be denied that his conduct was consistent with the object he had in view—that of securing the perpetuity of his labours; for in the case of Mr. Whitefield, who, though a more powerful preacher, yet neglected this discipline, the fruit of his labours died with himself.*

With the internal economy of Methodism, however, we have nothing to do. Suffice it to say then, that beyond the general principle of christian fellowship and the apostolic direction, that all things be done “decently and in order,” Mr. Wesley contended for no christian warrant for his discipline. He acknowledged that it was a series merely of prudential regulations, recommended by experience, or by their obvious utility; though, in apology for some of these regulations, he contends that he found something analogous in christian antiquity.

* Mr. Whitefield, observes Dr. A. Clarke, acknowledged himself that “Wesley had acted wisely. ‘The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labour. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.’ And what now remains of this great man’s labours? Multitudes were converted under his ministry, and are gone to God; but there is no spiritual succession.”—Miscellaneous Works, vol. xiii. p. 527.

After finding it impossible to visit the regular attendants of his ministry, at their several places of abode, in order to give them such advice and direction as they requested or required, he agreed to meet them all together on a Thursday evening; and thus, he observes, “arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterward called a Society.” . . . Upon reflection, I could not but observe, this is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times, those whom God had sent forth ‘preached the Gospel to every creature.’ And the *οἱ ἀκροαταί*, ‘the body of hearers,’ were mostly either Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met the *κατηχούμενοι*, ‘catechumens,’ (as they were then called,) apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities.” *

Here then commences the point of separation. The previous “irregularities” of Mr. Wesley, [his “field-preaching,” and “ex-parochial labours,”] would have terminated with his existence—entail-

* A Plain Account of the people called Methodists, in a Letter to the Rev. M. Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, in Kent. —Works, vol. viii. p. 250.

ing no other consequences than what might have casually flowed from them as a precedent. But the formation of distinct "Societies," though originating in the natural and unpremeditated manner above described, contained the germs of a future separation. This then was the precise period at which it would have been most desirable that the separation should have been prevented—"that breach which," as Bishop Coplestone remarks, "it may yet require the care and prudence of ages to close."

And here we might certainly, without any extravagance of fancy, conceive a state of things in which a closer approximation of practical views of Christianity, a stronger sympathy of feeling, and, consequently, a more effective co-operation might have existed between Mr. Wesley and his brethren, the National Clergy. We might conceive a state of things in which the zeal of his labours and the large measure of good which he effected, might have been accepted as some compensation for his ministerial "Irregularities," and in which (admitting the choice of evils, separation or concession) the "Societies" which Mr. Wesley organized, might have been recognized by his Ecclesiastical Superiors, as a *subsidiary* apparatus of the Church of England, if *duly committed to the clerical superintendence of those ministers in whose parishes the Societies had been formed*. Would Mr. Wesley *then* have objected to this arrangement? We think not, for the case subsequently put to Mr. Wesley by a few evangelical ministers of the

Church of England was *not* the case we are now considering.*

The desirableness of such an arrangement at this period, is admitted by one of the most eminent writers which the Wesleyan body has yet produced. "It would indeed have been more satisfactory," observes Mr. Watson, "if a pious clergyman had put himself at the head of these meetings, afforded the people his counsel, and restrained any irregularities or errors which might arise; and had clergymen so qualified and disposed been found, the church would have reaped the full benefit, and no separation, in any form, would have ensued." "Nor was Mr. Wesley himself without hope that these simple institutions for promoting piety, which he had commenced, might have been recognized. He hoped that the spirit of religion, produced already to so great an extent, might still further influence the members of the Church and its clergy, and dispose them to view his societies with more cordiality. He took care, therefore, and all his principles and feelings favoured the caution, that no obstacles should be placed in the way of the closest connexion of his societies with the Establishment,—none of their services were held in the hours of her public service; the Methodists formed in many parishes the great body of

* We have no space for discussing this subordinate part of the argument. The reader may consult Moore's Life, ii. 196—198. Methodist Magazine, vol. 1829, page 454.

her communicants ; thousands of them died in her communion ; and the lay-preachers were not permitted to administer either of the sacraments to the people among whom they laboured.”*

As the number of the societies increased, and, in the circumstances of the case, no co-operation on the part of the clergy could reasonably be anticipated, Mr. Wesley soon found himself involved in the dilemma either of relinquishing the societies, or employing *lay-agency*, and thus committing another violation of church order and discipline. Not possessing the faculty of ubiquity, and what with the hostility manifested towards his doctrines, and even the temporal interests of its professors, Mr. Wesley found, upon revisiting places where he had previously preached, that “the great part of his work was to begin again, if it could be begun again ;” and thus he conceived himself (however erroneously) to be under the necessity of supplying his own lack of personal superintendence by the appointment of lay-functionaries.

The first assistant appointed by Mr. Wesley was Mr. Maxfield, an individual, as it would appear from the sequel, of considerable talent and well acquainted with the Scriptures. His province was to meet the “Society” in London, during Mr. Wesley’s absence, “in order to confirm them, as he was able, in the ways of God, either by reading to them, or by prayer, or by exhortation.” Mr.

* Remarks on Southey’s Life of Wesley, p. 137, 138.

Maxfield, however, soon overstepped the limits of his province, and began to *preach*. This "irregularity" offended some of the society—a formal complaint was forwarded to Mr. Wesley, who, on receiving the intelligence, hastened to London for the sake of silencing the preacher. Mr. Wesley, however, upon the interference of his mother, was induced to "examine what had been the fruits of Maxfield's preaching, and to hear him himself;" and having done so, he submitted to the irregularity and the innovation.

Mr. Maxfield, however, was limited for a time to preaching in private houses and other subordinate places of worship, as would appear from a letter addressed by Mr. Wesley, (April, 1741,) to his brother C. Wesley, who was still more averse to this irregularity, "I am not clear that Brother Maxfield should not expound in Greyhound Lane; nor can I as yet do without him. Our clergymen have miscarried full as much as our laymen; and that the Moravians are other than laymen, I know not."* Mr. Maxfield was subsequently ordained priest by one of the Irish prelates, whose sympathy had been excited by the extraordinary labours of Mr. Wesley. "Mr. Maxfield," said the prelate, "I ordain you to assist that good man [Mr. Wesley] that he may not work himself to death."† It may be observed, that the lay-preachers were, at this time, confined to the

* Works, vol. xii. p. 107.

† Wesley's Works, vol. iii. p. 131.

reading-desk—a limitation which, if we recollect aright, was first infringed upon by a lay-preacher from Ireland of the name of Walsh.

In order to prevent any misconception of the views under which Mr. Wesley avows that he acted in reference to the employment of “lay-functionaries,” we quote the following “Apology,” from his “Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion.” “It pleased God,” says Mr. Wesley, “by two or three ministers of the Church of England, to call many sinners to repentance; who in several parts were undeniably turned from a course of sin to a course of holiness. The minister of the places where this was done, ought to have received those ministers with open arms.” “Instead of this, the greater part spoke of those ministers, as if the devil, not God, had sent them. Some repelled them from the Lord’s table; others stirred up the people against them, representing them, even in their public discourses, as fellows not fit to live; Papists, heretics, traitors; conspirators against their king and country. . . . They turned many (of their hearers) out of their work, persuaded others to do so too, and harassed them in all manner of ways.”

“What could we do in a case of so extreme necessity, where so many souls lay at stake? No clergyman would assist at all. The expedient that remained was, to find some one among themselves who was upright of heart, and of sound judgment in the things of God; and to desire him to meet the rest as often as he could, in

order to confirm them as he was able, in the ways of God, either by reading to them, or by prayer, or by exhortation.”* In a sermon (on Heb. v. 4) published about two years before his death, Mr. Wesley, having established the distinction between the *priestly* and the *prophetic* offices under the Old Dispensation, contends that the same analogy holds good under the New between the office of an *evangelist* or *teacher*, and that of a *pastor*, to whom peculiarly belongs the administration of the sacraments. We only quote the passage for the sake of the declaration which he appends, namely, “that he and his brother considered the lay-preachers in the light of *evangelists* or *preachers* only, when they received them as helpers in the work, or they never should have admitted them.”†

This exposition of Mr. Wesley’s views, with the detail of the circumstances connected with the introduction of lay-agency, will convince, we hope, even the most sceptical reader that Mr. Wesley did not effect this innovation for the sake of realising any preconceived plan of separating from the Establishment. We shall now see that the same remark applies with equal force to Mr. Wesley’s assuming and exercising the power of *ordination*. In this case, Mr. Wesley was still less fettered by his scruples than in the preceding ; for his assumption of the power of ordination was based as much upon *erroneous theory* as practical expedience.

* Works, vol. viii. p. 223, 224.

† See Moore’s Life of Wesley, vol. ii. p. 338, 339.

As early as 1740, Mr. Wesley states in his Journal, (Jan. 20,) that the reading of Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church, notwithstanding the vehement prejudice of his education, had made him ready to believe it a fair and impartial draught; "but, if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are essentially of one order." Again, in a letter written in 1756, he states that though he still believed "the episcopal form of church-government to be scriptural and apostolical, i. e, well agreeing with the practice and the writings of the apostles,"—yet he had been heartily ashamed of the opinion which he had previously espoused respecting "its being prescribed in Scripture," ever since he had read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*.* Again in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Walker, minister of Truro, dated 1755, he asks, "But is it lawful for presbyters, circumstanced as we are, to appoint other ministers? This is the very point wherein we desire advice, being afraid of leaning to our own understanding."† Again, in a reply to a Popish antagonist, published 1761, he denies that the Romish bishops came down by *uninterrupted succession* from the apostles. "I never could see it proved; and I am persuaded I never shall."

Now, why do we quote these passages? Certainly not for the sake of vindicating Mr. Wesley's opinions respecting Episcopacy, but for the sake of

* Wesley's Works, vol. xiii. p. 220.

† Works, vol. xv. p. 416.

vindicating him from a charge advanced by Dr. Southey, "that Mr. Wesley's opinion upon the apostolical succession rested on no better ground than its convenience to his immediate purpose." * The "immediate purpose" here alluded to was the ordination of Dr. Coke for America, which took place in 1784; but the assertion, that he took up his opinion on the apostolical succession for this purpose is contrary to fact, as will be seen by referring to the dates appended to the preceding quotations. It is probable that the Doctor was led into this mis-statement by his attention being directed solely to a passage written subsequent to that period, in reply to the severe animadversions of his brother (1785).†

On the subject of the ordination of Dr. Coke, who had solicited it from the hands of Mr. Wesley, "being conscious that an authority formally received from Mr. Wesley would be fully admitted by the Americans," ‡ we shall subjoin, as in preceding cases, Mr. Wesley's "Apology," from a letter preserved in the Minutes of 1785, merely repeating, that our object is not to defend or contest the positions of Mr. Wesley, but to show, by a careful collation of passages, under what circumstances and with what views Mr. Wesley committed those several violations of church order and discipline which we charge upon him.

After observing the peculiar situation of the provinces of North America — their independence

* Southey's Life of Wesley, vol. ii. p. 441.

† Moore's Life, vol. ii. p. 335.

‡ Ibid. p. 331.

having liberated them from the "claim or exercise of any ecclesiastical authority," and that some thousands of the inhabitants had desired his advice, Mr. Wesley proceeds: "Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church convinced me, many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and, consequently, have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace-sake, but because I was determined, as little as possible, to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged."

"But the case is widely different between England and North America. *Here* there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest. I have accordingly appointed," &c. . . . "And I have prepared a Liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England, (I think the best constituted national church in the world,) which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's day, in all the congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days."

At the close of the letter, he states in apology, that an application which he had previously made to the Bishop of London to "ordain only one preacher" for America, had been unsuccessful.

Subsequently, Mr. Wesley ordained ministers for Scotland, where, as in America, he states that he "invaded no man's right;" and it was not till the year 1790, that he claimed the full exercise of this power for England also. Thus a period of half a century had elapsed from his first employment of lay-preachers to the period of his assuming the full powers of presbyterian ordination—a circumstance which, when we consider the importunity of the preachers and the sanction which this assumption would have received at a far earlier period amongst the great bulk of his followers—cannot be received as demonstrative evidence of any preconcerted plan of effecting a separation, or any extraordinary rapidity in carrying that plan into execution.

The year 1784 has been termed the "grand climacterical year of Methodism," not only from Mr. Wesley's assuming the power of ordination, but also from his causing to be executed the "*Deed of Declaration*," an instrument which established a legal definition of the term "Conference," and which has mainly contributed to maintain the perpetuity of his system and the purity of its doctrines. This measure, however, as it affects only the internal economy of Methodism, cannot be considered as a fresh aggression on the order or rights of the

Establishment, except in so far as, by giving coherence, unity, and stability to the system, it had a direct tendency to render all the preceding aggressions perpetual.

With reference to the chapels that had been erected during the lifetime of Mr. Wesley, the various trust-deeds vested in Mr. Wesley the right of appointing preachers to the same; and the generality of those deeds further specified that this right should be exercised after his death by the "Conference of the people called Methodists." Many of these deeds, however, made no such posthumous provision; whilst, at the same time, as the "Conference," at that time, consisted only of Mr. Wesley and those ministers whose attendance he might think proper to request, no legal definition could be given to the term "Conference," and therefore the provision in the other trust-deeds would, upon the decease of Mr. Wesley, have been perfectly nugatory. These points, however, were not long left in obscurity. Mr. Wesley had studied ecclesiastical history to little purpose, if he had not observed the evil effects of lay government; if he had looked only to the Dissenters, he might have seen the pulpits of orthodox ministers of one generation occupied, in another, by Socinian preachers.

The "Deed of Declaration," however, which was enrolled in his Majesty's High Court of Chancery, in the year 1784, by setting forth "*what persons* are members of the said Conference, and how

the *succession* and *identity* thereof is to be continued," showed in whom the right of appointing "the preachers and expounders of God's holy word" to the various chapels was vested. "Without some authentic deed, fixing the meaning of the term," observes Mr. Wesley, "the moment I died, the Conference had been nothing. Therefore, any proprietors of the land on which our preaching-houses were built might have seized them for their own use; and there would have been none to hinder them: for the Conference would have been nobody—a mere empty name. You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this necessary deed, I have been labouring, not for myself, (I have no interest therein,) but for the whole body of Methodists; in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure. That is, if they continue to walk by faith, and show forth their faith by their works; otherwise I pray God to root out the memorial of them from the earth."* Amongst other provisos in this "Deed," it is specified that the Conference shall not appoint any minister to the same chapel for more than three years successively—thus binding a system of itinerancy upon the connexion for ever.

Such then was the relation of the Wesleyan Methodists to the church at the death of John Wesley.†

* Works, vol. xiii. p. 217.

† One further relaxation may be mentioned, "his allowing preaching in church hours under certain circumstances; as, first,

That all these measures had a tendency to effect a quasi-separation from the establishment cannot be doubted. That Mr. Wesley himself entertained his fears and suspicions on this point may also be conceded ; but that he introduced all or any of these innovations with the express object of effecting that separation is a position which must fall to the ground for want of proof.

We have said that Mr. Wesley himself entertained doubts respecting the ultimate tendency of his measures. As early as 1744, we find the following Query and Reply in the "Minutes" of that year. "Q. Do you not entail a schism on the church? that is, Is it not probable that your hearers, after your death, will be scattered into all sects and parties ; or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect? A. 1. We are persuaded the body of our hearers will even after our death remain in the church, unless they be thrust out. 2. We believe notwithstanding, either that they will be thrust out, or that they will leaven the whole church. 3. We do, and will do, all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed likely to happen after our death. 4. But we cannot with when the minister was wicked, or held pernicious doctrine ;—second, When the church would not contain the population of a town ; or where the church was distant. In that case he prescribed reading the Psalms and Lessons, and portions of his Abridgement of the Common Prayer, under the title of "Sunday Service of the Methodist." — *Watson's Life of Wesley*, p. 230.

a good conscience neglect the present opportunity of saving souls while we live, for fear of consequences which may possibly or probably happen after we are dead.”* The latter part of the Reply may receive some illustration from another passage: “To keep in full view the interests of Christ’s church in general, and of practical religion; not considering the Church of England or the cause of Methodism but as subordinate thereto; this is what I have punctually observed from the beginning.”

Thus we see that during the lifetime of its founder, the Wesleyan connexion (partly from the pressure of circumstances, but still more from that inherent tendency in all Societies to complete their organization) was led gradually to assume to itself almost all the functions of a christian church. The principal innovation, effected by the Conference after the death of Mr. Wesley, related to the *Administration of the Sacrament*. Hitherto the administration of this sacred rite had been confined to Mr. Wesley or to ministers episcopally ordained. In justice, however, to the Conference, who have been frequently assailed on this point, we must allow that the restriction abovementioned did not give satisfaction during the lifetime of Mr. Wesley—that it required all the *prestige* of his name and authority to keep the spirit of discontent in abeyance, and that, in the latter part of his life, many societies smothered their discontent through a considerate regard for the growing infirmities of age.

* Works, vol. viii. p. 217.

In proof of this dissatisfaction we adduce the following observations from his Journals. "I fain would prevent the members here (at Epworth,) from leaving the church ; but I cannot do it. As Mr. G. is not a pious man, but rather an enemy to piety, who frequently preaches against the truth, and those that hold and love it, I cannot, with all my influence, persuade them either to hear him or to attend the Sacrament administered by him. If I cannot carry this point even while I live, who then can do it when I die ? And the case of Epworth is the case of every church where the minister neither loves nor preaches the Gospel. The Methodists will not attend his ministrations. What then is to be done ?"* "I have much reason to believe," (observes Dr. A. Clarke, when appealed to on this subject as a matter of contemporary history,) "that for many years before Mr. Wesley's death, the great majority of our people ardently wished for the Sacrament to be administered among themselves."†

Upon the death of Mr. Wesley, (who died March 2, 1791, at the advanced age of eighty-eight years,) the dissatisfaction previously existing relative to the administration of the Sacrament, broke out with renewed vigour. It must also be admitted that, as the Conference, with only two or three exceptions, now consisted of ministers who had never received

* Wesley's Journal, vol. iv. p. 419.

† Methodist Magazine, vol. 1829, p. 669, note.

episcopal ordination, and therefore did not stand in the same relation to the establishment, as Mr. Wesley himself; a favourable opportunity would seem to present itself to those who were desirous of effecting the innovation. The Conference, however, though not ignorant of the feeling which pervaded the Societies on this subject, manifested no desire to foster that feeling; for in the Minutes of that year, (July 1791,) they “engaged themselves strictly to follow the plan which Mr. Wesley left them at his death.”

This disappointment of their hopes, perhaps, only served to excite a stronger feeling of discontent in the aggrieved parties, and to inspire them with greater vigour in the prosecution of their object. In London, the Sacrament had always been administered to the “Societies” by ministers episcopally ordained; and thus the “country Methodists supposed themselves to be much slighted and neglected in comparison with their friends in town who were suitably attended.”* Yet in all this, the *animus* of dissent from the Establishment does not appear to have been particularly strong; for in places where there were “pious ministers,” the objections to Mr. Wesley’s plan would appear to have been discountenanced.†

The general consequence, however, of this

* Reply from Newcastle-upon-Tyne to the Hull Circular July 5, 1791.

† Thus, in the Reply, quoted above, of the Newcastle Methodists to those resident in Hull, it is observed, “If all the large

state of things was, that this sacred ordinance was neglected; for many of the Methodists communicated nowhere, whilst a spirit of party was engendered by a pamphleteering war which sprung up "between the sticklers for what was called the Old Plan, and those who wished to see something more conformable to their ideas of christian liberty."* In 1792,† the applications for this concession were so urgent, that the Conference agreed to decide by lot, not the question (as has been sometimes stated) whether they had any scriptural authority to administer the Sacrament, but whether it should be administered in the various chapels during the ensuing year, for "the preachers were sensible, that either to allow or refuse the privilege, would greatly increase the uneasiness, and perhaps cause a division."‡ The result of the decision was thus stated in "Minutes :"—"The Lord's Supper shall not be administered by any person among our Societies in England and Ireland, for the ensuing year, on any consideration whatever, except in London."

The postponement of the question for a year had no effect, however, in terminating the controversy.

towns throughout the kingdom were favoured, as you are (with pious ministers,) there would be some reason for our communicating in the church."

* Crowther's Portraiture of Methodism, p. 131.

† Most of the Pamphlets previously alluded to bear a date subsequent to this.

‡ Myles's Chronological History, p. 219.

Matters came to a crisis, in 1793, and the Conference were reduced to a dilemma—division or concession. Anxious to conciliate both parties—the “Dissentients,” who stood upon the rights of conscience, and those who preferred a closer adherence to the church—the Conference came to the resolution of conceding the administration of the Sacrament by their own preachers to those societies where the desire for it was unanimous; for *perfect unanimity* was requisite, or the boon would not be granted. In a circular letter, which communicated this regulation, the Conference observe, “We allow the full force of the arguments which the brethren who disapprove of the administration of the Lord’s Supper urge as above; nor can we, on any consideration, lay on them a new term of communion, or suffer a *single* person among them to be grieved by the reasonings of those who wish for an innovation in our plan.” . . . “We came, therefore, to the following resolution: ‘That the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall not be administered by the preachers, in any part of our connexion, except where the *whole Society* is unanimous for it, and will *not be contented* without it; and, in even those few exempt societies, it shall be administered, as far as practicable, in the evening only, and according to the form of the Church of England.’ For we could not bear that the sacrament, which was instituted by our Lord as a bond of peace and union, should become a bone of contention.” In a subsequent address of that year, the Conference,

after alluding to this regulation, observes, " But we are determined, as a body, to remain in connexion with the Church of England; and again advise you to be satisfied with the simple original plan of Methodism, which has been so wonderfully blessed of the Lord. . . . And we do assure you, that we have no design or desire to make our Societies separate churches."

However praiseworthy the moderation of the Conference in treating this difficult question must appear to every impartial inquirer, yet the expedient was not successful. Perfect unanimity was requisite to ensure the concession; but it is difficult to meet with perfect unanimity; and the mere fact of an *overwhelming majority* (which brought them no nearer the object of their wishes, unless it ultimately reached the *maximum* of perfect unanimity) could only serve to render those who constituted that majority still more familiar with "patience smiling at grief." The dissentients, in many instances, could derive no benefit from the regulation announced in the circular of 1793; and they, therefore, complained that the Conference, by their *unanimity-law*, had "put receiving the sacrament upon an impossible condition to most places, where very great majorities of the people were for it," for if there was a single objector "in a society of a thousand persons, they could not have it according to the letter of that decree." * The Conference,

* Earnest Address by Paul and Silas.

however, of 1794, made no concession to these remonstrances; in fact, they confirmed the preceding regulation. "As the Lord's Supper has not been administered, except where the Society has been unanimous for it, and would not have been contented without it; it is now agreed that the Lord's Supper shall not be administered in future, where the union and concord of the Society can be preserved without it." Further: "Preaching in church hours shall not be permitted, except for special reasons, and where it will not cause a division."

The controversy, however, was not terminated; the combatants re-appeared again when the regulation was confirmed, and the campaign of 1795 was opened with a fresh levy of pamphlets and circulars. There were also other sources of disturbance. It was the era of the French revolution—of abstract speculation upon the nature and theory of government; and several persons in the Wesleyan body, anxious to apply an uniform test to ecclesiastical as well as civil government, were desirous of reconstructing the polity of that body upon democratic principles. What with the question of administering the sacrament and the question of accommodating their system to popular claims, (which, however, does not belong to our subject,) the Conference, when they assembled in 1795, were "deeply touched with the awful situation of their affairs. They trembled at the thought of a division and its dreadful consequences; and, therefore, determined to set apart the first day of

the Conference as a day of solemn and real fasting and prayer.”*

A committee of eight (exclusive of the president of the Conference) was chosen, to draw up a plan for settling the differences; and this committee (including Mr. Moore, Mr. Benson, Dr. Coke, and Dr. A. Clarke,) appears to have been of a *mixed* character. The following leading resolution relative to the present question, was then adopted by the Conference. “The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall not be administered in any chapel, except a majority of the trustees of that chapel on the one hand, and the majority of the stewards and leaders, belonging to that chapel, (as the best qualified to give the sense of the people,) on the other hand, allow of it. Nevertheless, in all cases, the consent of the Conference shall be obtained before the Lord’s Supper be administered.”

Other resolutions follow, vesting in Conference the *sole* right of authorising those who are to administer the sacrament—limiting its administration to those Sundays on which it is *not* administered in the parochial church, and directing it to be administered according to the form of the Established Church.† The following resolution was also agreed

* Minutes of 1795.

† We have been thus particular in detailing the history of this innovation, because we have seen, with pain, certain invidious attempts to depreciate the conduct of the Methodist Conference in contrast with that of Mr. Wesley. We believe, however, that the facts afford no evidence of the Conference wishing or attempting to “set up for themselves,”—that the whole proceed-

to: "Wherever divine service is performed in England, on the Lord's day, in church hours, the officiating preacher shall read either the service of the Established Church, our venerable Father's abridgement, or, at least, the lessons appointed by the calendar. But we recommend either the full service or the Abridgement."* These resolutions, with others affecting the internal economy of Methodism, constitute what is generally termed the "Plan of Pacification;" and as those, specified above, have been final and satisfactory, the sepa-

ings were not "a farce of solemn mockery," or that the Conference, "by repeated consultations and continued excitement of the minds of the people, brought about a remarkable alienation from the Establishment." On this point we quote from a letter of Dr. A. Clarke, (published in 1829,) whose simplicity of character is a sufficient guarantee for the accuracy of any statements connected with his personal experience or observation. "I have been a preacher in the Methodist connexion more than half a century, and have been a travelling preacher forty-seven years, (1782—1829,) and I ever found many people in most places of the connexion very uneasy at not having the sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered in our own chapels, by our own preachers." . . . "In short, it was not our Societies who held the high church opinions, but the preachers." . . . "I can solemnly say, I never knew the preachers agitate the matter among the people: and it is an utter slander to say, that the preachers excited the people to clamour for the ordinances, because they wished by it to promote their own honour and interest."—Meth. Mag. p. 669, *note*, and p. 738.

* Warren's *Chronicles of Wesleyan Methodism*, vol. i. p. 223—225. Ed. 1827.

ration now existing between the Church of England and Wesleyan Methodism was completed in the year 1795.

But it is necessary to admit another important element into our estimate in order to form a correct judgment of the degree of culpability which attaches to Mr. Wesley, and, subsequently, to the Wesleyan Conference, in effecting those various aggressions on the rights and order of the church which have been now detailed. Was the treatment which he received at the hands of the clergy and members of the national church such as was calculated to win him from his clerical "irregularities," and fix him in that subordinate sphere which was his proper province as a true son of the church, and in conformity with the requirements of canonical obedience? Or was the treatment which his followers received from the same parties such as was calculated to win them from the "error of their ways," and attach them to the communion of that church, not as "irregular auxiliaries," but as forming the main phalanx of her strength? Was the treatment mild, persuasive, conciliatory? Did it evince any of that courtesy which is especially due to those who, we have reason to believe, are not wilfully in error?

If this was not the case, then was exhibited a deplorable want not merely of christian charity, but of correct and gentlemanly feeling; then was a miserable blunder committed even as to secular policy; and at this distance of time, with the results of that separation (which such

treatment must have precipitated) fully developed before our eyes, the Church of England may well complain of having been wounded in the "house of her friends." It was of this treatment that Mr. Wesley and his followers have complained. "Whereas," says Mr. Wesley in his "Advice to the Methodists," "the congregations to which other separatists belonged have generally spared no pains to prevent that separation; those to which you belong spare no pains [not to prevent but] to occasion this separation, to drive you from them, to force you on that division to which you declare you have the strongest aversion."

With respect to the exclusion of Mr. Wesley from the pulpits of the national church, we have granted the full right of exclusion to the parties claiming it, and have only disputed the principles on which they chose to exercise that right. But beyond that right, and the right of expressing their own views on doctrinal subjects with firmness and consistency, we know of no others which can be fairly claimed or conceded. We think, therefore, that the minister of Epworth stepped somewhat beyond his province, when he refused to admit Mr. Wesley to the sacrament, alleging that he considered him "unfit to receive it." In various parts of Mr. Wesley's Journals we find instances of the clergy murmuring at the number of communicants which his preaching brought to the church, threatening to repel them, or actually repelling them;* whilst he

* Moore's Life, vol. i. 518; ii. 76, 270.

himself was denounced as a "Papist, Jesuit, seducer, and bringer-in of the Pretender." *

Numerous extracts like the following might be selected from Mr. Wesley's Journals :—" 1748, Sept 12. Bandon (in Ireland.) It grieved me to hear the poor encouragement given last Sunday to the crowds that flocked to church, which place some of them had not troubled for years before. We send them to church to hear ourselves railed at, and, what is far worse, the truth of God." . . . "Sept. 13. I rode on to Kinsale. Here, also, the minister, instead of rejoicing to see so many publicans in the temple, entertained them with a railing accusation against me, as an impostor, an incendiary, and messenger of Satan. Strange justice ! that Mr. P. should be voted a friend of the church, and I an enemy who send hundreds into the church for him to drive out again." † In considering the Wesleyan side of the case, we are bound, therefore, to admit that some force attaches to the plea put forward by his biographers and apologists, that "the intemperate attacks from the pulpit, and the Methodists being frequently regarded as intruders at the table of the Lord, rather than as welcome communicants," were among the "true causes which led to the partial separation of the Wesleyan Societies from the communion of the church, after the death of Mr. Wesley." ‡

* Moore's Life, vol. i. p. 517. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 198.

‡ Watson's Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley, p. 140.

In the year 1788, Mr. Wesley, about three years before his death, found his Societies in the following dilemma. Hitherto the greater number of the preachers and chapels had been licensed under the "Toleration Act," not because the Methodists were Dissenters, (for whose case the Act had been provided,) but in order to protect themselves against the violence of lawless men, and especially to avoid the penalties of the "Conventicle Act," which, though purporting only to prevent seditious meetings, might be construed as affecting all religious assemblies, except in the churches of the Establishment. Ingenious men, however, found out that as the Methodists professed to be of the Church of England, the "Toleration Act" could not extend to them; and, though they had been undisturbed on this point for nearly fifty years, their application for licenses was now treated in a summary manner. "You shall have no license, unless you declare yourselves Dissenters." Some who considered that holding meetings for prayer or preaching without the authority of the diocesan was a species of dissent, acceded to the condition. But this was not sufficient; and the applicants were met by a more stringent requirement, "You must not only profess yourselves Dissenters; you must declare that you scruple to attend the service or sacraments of the church, or we can grant you no relief; for the Act in question was made only for those who have those scruples."

The ingenuity of these men had now reached its

acmé; the informers took the hint, and wherever the Wesleyans held a meeting for preaching or praying, the fines imposed by the Conventicle Act were duly levied upon them. In vain was it that the offenders appealed to the quarter sessions for relief. The justices declared that "the Methodists could have no relief from the 'Act of Toleration,' because they went to church; and that, so long as they did so, the 'Conventicle Act' should be executed upon them." This accordingly was acted upon; and Mr. Wesley, in stating to a member of parliament whom he requests "to speak a word to Mr. Pitt on that head," observes, "Last Sunday, when one of our ministers was beginning to speak to a quiet congregation, a neighbouring justice sent a constable to seize him, though he was licensed; and would not release him till he had paid twenty pounds, telling him 'his license was good for nothing, *because he was a churchman.*' Now, sir, what can the Methodists do? They are liable to be ruined by the 'Conventicle Act,' and they have no relief from the 'Act of Toleration!'"

It may be stated, in defence, that the law, in not providing for the case of the Methodists, never contemplated such a singular phenomenon as that of an organized religious community holding meetings in other places than the churches of the Establishment, and yet refusing to declare their dissent from the principles of that Establishment. It certainly was not wise to revive the provisions of an obsolete Act, which, as far as it affected the religious

assemblies of Dissenters, had been superseded by the "Act of Toleration," though that Act only contemplated the case of Dissenters! Whatever the letter of the Act might be, the spirit in which it originated was manifest—to prevent *religious* assemblies coming under the same legal category as *sedition* and unlawful meetings.

Again, the Methodists had acquired a prescriptive right against molestation on this score. For nearly fifty years they had reposed in security under the Act of Toleration; and was it wise, therefore, without any change in the circumstances of the case, to draw forth the terrors of the Conventicle Act from their "dread abode?" for its penal clauses inflicted fines, not only upon the preachers, but upon the occupants of the houses where the meetings were held, and all who were present at those meetings. That discreet magistrates should have lent their sanction to the revival of an obsolete law, instead of assisting the Methodists to obtain a special legal provision for their own case, does, indeed, at this distance of time, seem passing strange! This zeal in reviving the Conventicle Act was denounced by Mr. Wesley as "persecution."

Under these circumstances, and at the advanced age of eighty-seven, (1790,) Mr. Wesley wrote a letter of remonstrance to a certain prelate in whose diocese the Conventicle Act was executed. It is written in strong language, not bearing, perhaps, sufficiently in mind the state of the law, and probably the conscientious scruples of the prelate

whom he addressed. The following is an extract :
 “ The Methodists, in general, my lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her service, and partake of her sacraments. They do not willingly do harm to any one, but do what good they can to all. To encourage each other therein, they frequently spend an hour together in prayer and mutual exhortation. Permit me, then, to ask, *cui bono*? ‘For what reasonable end,’ would your lordship drive these people out of the church? Are they not as quiet, as inoffensive, nay, as pious, as any of their neighbours? Except, perhaps, here and there a hair-brained man, who knows not what he is about. Do you ask, ‘Who drives them out of the church?’ Your lordship does; and that in the most cruel manner; yea, and the most disingenuous manner. They desire a license to worship God after their own conscience. Your lordship refuses, and then punishes them for not having a license! So your lordship leaves them only this alternative, ‘Leave the church or starve.’ And is it a Christian, yea, a Protestant bishop, that so persecutes his own flock? I say *persecutes*, for it is persecution to all intents and purposes. You do not burn them, indeed, but you starve them: and how small is the difference! And your lordship does this under colour of a vile, execrable law, not a whit better than that **de hæretico comburendo!*” †

* “On the Burning of Heretics.”

† Moore’s Life of Wesley, vol. ii. p. 385.

We have been more particular in detailing the unpleasant results arising from the execution of the "Conventicle Act," because the biographers and apologists of Mr. Wesley have connected with it an aggression on the episcopal functions as their direct and immediate result. Mr. Wesley had hitherto ordained ministers only for Scotland, and America,* contending that, in these cases, he violated no man's right. "But during the period alluded to, (says his biographer,) being assisted by other ministers of the Church of England, he set apart a certain number of preachers for the sacred office by the imposition of his hands and prayer, without sending them *out* of England."† "It was in the agony of mind, (says his Apologist‡) caused by the proceedings relative to the Conventicle Act, that Mr. Wesley, who perceived their tendency was either to extinguish Methodism, or force his Societies on dissent, preferred the milder alternative; and in anticipation of the separation of his Societies from the church, conferred a Presbyterian ordination on certain individuals of the Conference, guarded, however, and qualified by his inextinguishable attachment to the Church of England. One of those individuals, we are told, 'he ordained *after writing the above letter*, and but a short time before his

* "Whatever, then, is done, either in America or Scotland, is no separation from the Church of England. *I have no thought of this*; I have many objections against it. It is a totally different case."—Minutes of 1786, vol. i. p. 279.

† Moore's Life, vol. ii. 386.

‡ Dr. Sandwith, M. D.

death." " Now in defending this most decisive of all the measures, tending to separation, taken by Mr. Wesley, we may observe that it was clearly occasioned *principally* by the hostility of the church and its partisans." *

The proceedings connected with the "Conventicle Act," are sufficient to demonstrate that the principles of Wesleyan Methodism, notwithstanding its "departure from the apostolic ordinance," has nothing in common with the principles of dissent. Whatever deviations from church order and discipline may be fairly chargeable upon the Wesleyans, it would be difficult, after taking an impartial view of the subject, to prove that these deviations have been committed out of a spirit of wanton hostility to the Establishment. The question is stated by Mr. Wesley in the "Large Minutes" with his usual perspicuity. "Q. But are we not Dissenters? A. No. Although we call sinners to repentance in all places of God's dominion; and, although we frequently use extemporary prayer, and unite together in a religious society; yet we are not Dissenters in the only sense which our law acknow-

* Methodist Magazine, pp. 603, 604, vol. 1829. "The increasing infirmities of Mr. Wesley prevented him from bestowing the necessary attention upon an application to parliament for the repeal of the Conventicle Act. The question, however, was carefully prepared and came to issue, about twenty years after, in what has been called 'Lord Sidmouth's Bill.' The issue was decisive, and caused a reaction that set the question completely at rest."—Moore's Life, vol. ii. p. 386, *note*.

ledges, namely, those who renounce the service of the Church. We do not, we dare not, separate from it. We are not seceders, nor do we bear any resemblance to them. We set out upon quite opposite principles. The seceders laid the very foundation of their work in judging and condemning others. We laid the foundation of our work in judging and condemning ourselves. They begin, everywhere, with showing their hearers how fallen the church and ministers are. We begin everywhere with showing our hearers, how fallen they are themselves.”*

This peculiarity of character in the Wesleyan Methodists was, at their request, stated to the House of Commons in the year 1813, when the new law of religious toleration was under discussion; and to meet their case the term “Dissenter” and its correlatives were omitted by the legislature in that important enactment.† Assuming, then, for argument’s sake, that the principles of Methodism had been correct in an ecclesiastical as well as a scriptural point of view, Mr. Wesley was justified in warning his followers, upon *that* assumption, against separation from the church, by sound historical precedent, or rather by the *principle* which that historical precedent involves.

Thus, for instance, in a sermon preached on laying the foundation of the City Road Chapel, (April

* Warren’s Chronicles of Wesleyan Methodism, p. 81.

† Jackson’s Church and the Methodists, p. 42.

21, 1777,) Mr. Wesley observes, "It cannot be denied that there have been several revivals of religion in England since the Reformation. But the generality of the English nation were little profited thereby; because they that were the subjects of those revivals, preachers as well as people, soon separated from the Established Church, and formed themselves into a distinct sect. So did the Presbyterians first, afterwards the Independents, the Anabaptists, and the Quakers. And after this was done, they did scarce any good, except to their own little body. As they chose to separate from the church, so the people remaining therein separated from them, and generally contracted a prejudice against them. But these were immensely the greatest number; so that, by that unhappy separation, the hope of a general national reformation was totally cut off."

We confess that, in the present instance, our historical reading is not sufficiently extensive to vindicate or impugn the character of these several revivals. But the principle, contended for by Mr. Wesley, is a sound one; and its propriety he has further illustrated by an appeal to the analogous case of pious Christians, who separated from the church in the second and third centuries. "Some of these," he observes, "retired into the desert, and lived altogether alone; others built themselves houses, afterwards termed convents, and only secluded themselves from the rest of the world. But what was the fruit of this separation? The same that might easily be foreseen. It increased and con-

firmed, in an astonishing degree, the total corruption of the church."

If, therefore, we have laboured to state the principles of Mr. Wesley with fairness and candour; we entreat his followers to abide by their application. He considered even the corruption of the church as no apology for separation; and, as the Wesleyans themselves acknowledge "its recent religious improvement,"* the case is, therefore, not altered for the worse. Mr. Wesley has answered, by anticipation, all possible objections against attending the ministrations of the Establishment. In the "Large Minutes,"† (a public document by which the special character and work of the preacher are defined, and which contains most of the rules whereby they consent to be governed,) he earnestly requests his preachers, 1st, to "exhort all the people to keep close to the church and sacrament; 2nd, to warn them all against niceness in hearing, a prevailing evil! 3rd, to warn them also against despising the prayers of the church."‡ He quotes for their instruction the example of a zealous Papist, (Mr. Hook,) who, in apology for attending the Protestant service where there was no Romish service, observed, "If I cannot have such worship as I would, I will have such worship as I can."§

* Watson's Life of Wesley, p. 361, A. D. 1831.

† Entitled, "Minutes of several conversations," (at the annual Conference) "between the Rev. John Wesley, A. M., and others. From the year 1744 to the year 1789."

‡ Warren's Chronicles of Methodism, p. 80. § Ib. p. 82.

In the same document Mr. Wesley cautions his followers against considering their own service as a substitute for the service of the Establishment. "But some may say, 'Our own service is public worship.' Yes, in a *sense*, but not such as supersedes the church service. We never designed it should. It pre-supposes public prayer, like the sermons at the University. If it were designed to be instead of the church service, it would be essentially defective. For it seldom has the four grand parts of public prayer, *deprecation*, *petition*, *intercession*, and *thanksgiving*. If the people put ours in the room of the church service, we hurt them that stay with us, and ruin them that leave us." *

Again, in the Minutes of 1786, Mr. Wesley "advises every one who preaches in the church hours, to read the psalms and lessons, with part of the church prayers; because we apprehend this will *endear the church service* to our brethren, who probably would be prejudiced against it, if they heard none but extemporary prayer." † Again, in a sermon preached at Cork, in 1789, only two years before his death, Mr. Wesley declares the same attachment to the church, and enforces it on the consciences of his hearers. "Though ye have, and will have, a thousand temptations to leave it, and set up for yourselves, regard them not. Be Church-of-England men still. Do not cast away

* Warren's Chronicles of Methodism, p. 82.

† Ibid. p. 191.

the peculiar glory which God hath put upon you, and frustrate the design of Providence, the very end for which God hath raised you up." Even the Apologists of Mr. Wesley allow that his churchmanship reached a higher standard than that of his followers. "Perhaps the hope of preserving his Societies in connexion with the church, was indulged much longer than the reason of the case would warrant, from his own ardent feelings, as a *churchman* ; but when, at least, a partial separation was in reality foreseen as probable, it had *no sanction* from him ; and he appeared determined to employ his influence to his last breath, that, if separation did ensue, it should assume the mildest form possible, and be deprived of all feelings of hostility. His example, the spirit of his writings, and his advices, all tended to this."* This, perhaps, is worded too mildly ; and the "no sanction" might be converted into "positive disapproval."

The expressions of attachment to the church, quoted above, on the part of Mr. Wesley, were not the mere expressions of a casual sentiment, intended for the public eye ; he proceeded, on all occasions, in his capacity as the founder of Methodism, to exemplify them in practice, converting what might have been considered as vague advice into "positive precept." In his directions to the assistant preachers, (afterwards termed Superintendents,) contained in the "Larger

* Watson's Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley, p. 137.

Minutes"* specified above, he says, "Exhort all that were brought up in the church to continue therein. Set the example yourself, and immediately change every plan† that would hinder their being at church, at least two Sundays in four. Carefully avoid whatever has a tendency to separate men from the church; and let all the servants in our preaching-houses go to church once on Sundays at least."‡

The following exemplifications of his practice, extracted from his "Journals," will be read with pleasure and interest. "1759. Thursday, 25th. I had appointed to preach, at seven in the evening, at Bradford; but when I came, I found Mr. Hart was to preach at six; so I delayed till the church service was ended, that there might not appear (at least on my part) even the shadow of opposition between us. 1760. Friday, 4th. I took my ease, riding in a chaise to Limerick; where, on Saturday, 5th, ten of us met in a little conference. By the blessing of God, we were all of one mind, particularly with regard to the church; even J. D. has not now the least thought of leaving it, but attends there, be the minister good or bad. 1767. Monday, 23rd. I rode to Yarmouth, and found

* Minutes of Conference, published in 1770. See "Large Minutes."

† A Methodist paper, published periodically in each circuit, specifying what preachers will officiate at the various places of worship, and the *time* when the service will commence.

‡ Chronicles of Methodism, p. 80.

the Society, after the example of Mr. W——p, had entirely left the church. I judged it needful to speak largely upon that head; they stood reproved, and resolved, one and all, to go to it again. 1770. Sunday, 17th. We had a poor sermon at church. However, I went again in the afternoon, remembering the words of Mr. Philip Henry, ‘If the preacher does not know his duty, I bless God that I know mine.’”

A few additional extracts,* bringing down the sentiments of Mr. Wesley to a later period, will show that Mr. Wesley’s sentiments of attachment to the church still remained unabated towards the close of his career. “1786. July 25th. The Conference began at Bristol; about eighty preachers attended We all determined to continue in the church, without one dissenting voice: and I doubt not but this determination will stand at least till I am removed into a better world. 1787. Jan. 2nd. I went over to Deptford; but it seemed I was got into a den of lions. Most of the leading men of the Society were mad for separating from the church. At length, after meeting the whole Society, I told them, ‘If you are resolved, you may have your service in church-hours; but, remember, from that time you will see my face no more.’ This struck deep, and from that hour I have heard no more of *separating* from the church.†

* Dr. Whitehead’s Life of Wesley, vol. ii. p. 502.

† Some relaxation on that point was made in the lifetime of

1789. July 3. Our little conference began in Dublin, and ended, Tuesday 7th. . . . I never saw such a number of preachers before so unanimous in all points, particularly as to leaving the church, which none of them had the least thought of."

In a letter to a friend, dated London, February 17th, 1787, published in the "Wesleyan Methodist Magazine" for September, 1834, the following passage occurs: "By all means go to church as often as you can, and exhort all Methodists so to do. They that are enemies to the church, are enemies to *me*. I am a friend to it, and ever was. By our reading prayers we prevent our people's contracting an hatred for forms of prayer, which would naturally be the case, if we always prayed extempore." And again, in another letter to one of his preachers, published in the "British Magazine," for September, 1834, and dated February 21st, 1787, Mr. Wesley observes, "Modern laziness has jumbled together the two distinct offices of preaching and administering the sacraments. But be that as it may, I will rather lose twenty Societies than *separate* from the church."

Mr. Wesley. The following remark occurs in his Journal:—"1787. Nov. 4th. London. The congregation was, as usual, large and serious, but there is no increase in the Society. So that we have profited nothing by having our service in church-hours, which some imagined would have done wonders. I do not know that it has done more good anywhere in England—in Scotland, I believe, it has."

The last extract that we shall make, is taken from a paper of Mr. Wesley's, (dated December 11th, 1789,) published in the *Arminian Magazine* for April, 1790,* page 214, entitled "Further Thoughts on Separation from the Church," and which concludes thus—"And this is no way contrary to the profession which I have made above these fifty years. I never had any design of separating from the church; I have no such design now; I do not believe that the Methodists in general design it, when I am no more seen. Nevertheless, in spite of all that I can do, many of them will separate from it, (although, I am apt to think, not one half, perhaps not one third.) These will be so bold and injudicious as to form a separate party, which, consequently, will dwindle away into a dry, dull, separate party. In flat opposition to these, I declare once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it."†

To this may be added a quotation from a pamphlet published shortly after the death of Mr. Wesley, "by a Member of the Established Church," and entitled, "Considerations on a Separation of the Methodists from the Established Church." The reader may attach what credit he pleases to the

* Mr. Wesley, it will be observed, died March 2nd, 1791, aged 88.

† See also "*Arminian Magazine*" for 1789, vol. xii. p. 45.

statement, but as it contains nothing inconsistent with the openly avowed and published sentiments of Mr. Wesley, and the writer confirms it by his "solemn asseveration," we are inclined to accept it as authentic. In reference to the preceding quotation from the "Arminian Magazine," the writer observes, "But let it not be thought that Mr. Wesley then spoke what he did not think *before*. No ; these last solemn words were the result of long consideration and uniform conviction. I solemnly aver, that in the year 1777 or 1778, I asked him the question, — 'Sir, in case the Methodists should, after your death, leave the Church of England, what would you advise your friends to do?' He answered immediately, 'I would advise them to adhere to the church, and quit the Methodists;' but added he, 'that will never be necessary ; for, if some quit the church, others will adhere to it, and then there will be dissenting Methodists and church Methodists.' "*"

The preceding extracts enable us pretty clearly to ascertain what ideas constituted, in Mr. Wesley's mind, the definition of "Separation." The last remaining bonds of union between the Church of England and Methodism, as it existed in his time, were (except in cases previously specified) the restriction of the hours of preaching to those which did not interfere with the service of the church, and the non-administration of the Sacrament by Wesleyan ministers. His idea of union with the church

* 2nd. Ed. 1794.

did not involve merely a casual but a *general* attendance on her services; and, as the Sacrament could not be administered by their own preachers, Wesleyan communicants must, *of necessity*, have repaired to the church. But time passed on (*dies truditur die*;) and these salutary regulations, questioned and discussed, it is true, during the lifetime of Mr. Wesley, were ultimately superseded by the "Plan of Pacification" adopted in 1795.

In stating the case relative to the administration of the Sacrament in the preceding pages, we flatter ourselves that even Wesleyan writers themselves will allow that we have endeavoured to state it fairly. We have seen that Mr. Wesley himself anticipated the possibility, and perhaps the probability, that a separation might ultimately take place; but he hoped that such an event would at least not be realized till "he was removed to a better world." We have made every allowance too for the difficulty in which the Conference was placed subsequently to his death—we have seen the alacrity with which they engaged to "follow in the steps of Mr. Wesley," and recommend to the Societies under their care "the simple original plan" of Methodism. We have seen that the discussion occupied five sessions of the Conference—a circumstance certainly manifesting no extraordinary precipitancy in deviating from that "plan." We have made allowance, too, for the "pressure from without;" and we have conceded that the blame of agitation attaches more to the "Societies" than to the "Con-

ference"—more to the constituent than the deliberative body.

Let the Wesleyans, then, extend the same candour to us as we have extended to them. From any uncertain hypothesis as to what Mr. Wesley himself would have done in similar circumstances, our conclusions must be still more uncertain. Let us look merely to the evidence of facts—of opinions openly avowed and consistently maintained. When the Wesleyans have weighed this evidence, let them cheerfully concede to us the admission that the "separation" of Methodism from the Church of England, as effected by the "plan of pacification" in 1795, (however much it may be palliated by the necessities of the case,) was in "flat opposition" to the advice and example of Mr. Wesley, and to the principles which he uniformly inculcated during a long ministerial career of half a century. That Mr. Wesley considered separation from the church only justifiable on the condition of the Methodists being "thrust out," cannot be denied; but that the Methodists were "thrust out" from the church, after the death of Mr. Wesley, who will assert?

We have now brought to a close our observations on the rise, progress, and final establishment of Wesleyan Methodism, as a religious system, considered in relation to the church. Our object was

to explain this singular phenomenon—to show under what circumstances the two parties have assumed their relative position, and upon what grounds they respectively occupy that position. We have endeavoured to attain that object by a course of fair, candid, and documentary investigation. We have no intention of adding a “moral to our tale;” for reflections would now be useless, and might only lead to still more useless recrimination. That grave errors were committed on both sides must be acknowledged by all impartial inquirers, who are attached less to the cause of party than the cause of truth.

“Iliacos intrà muros peccatur et extrà.”

But beyond this general admission we cannot go; and we leave to more adventurous writers the task of distributing the praise or censure in fair and rateable proportions.

“*Time past*,” it has been beautifully observed by a Stoical writer, is as “something consecrated to the gods;” it is beyond the power “of fortune or of man.” Regret, therefore, is unavailing; and we must accept this condition of things as a legacy, if not of the wisdom, at least of the errors, of our ancestors.

But though we accept this condition of things with all its difficulties, we need not resign ourselves as the victims of stoical resignation and despair. Nothing certainly need preclude us from “casting

about" for some expedient which may assist us in obtaining a practical solution of these difficulties. To us, indeed, it is a matter of regret that the "tide" was not "taken at the flood" at an earlier period. Success would then have been more probable; and we should thus have avoided those "shoals and miseries" on which we have been subsequently stranded.

This, however, shall not deter us from making an attempt; and, if any should consider us as uselessly employed in even doing this, let them consider the grounds of our confidence. The strongest bond of union between Wesleyan Methodism and the Church of England is to be found in the neat, terse, elegant, and imperishable writings of Mr. Wesley himself. And we would recommend to the consideration of both parties one catholic principle enunciated in those writings, and which Mr. Wesley professes to have adopted as his rule of conduct,—“to consider the ‘Church of England,’ or the ‘cause of Methodism,’ but as subordinate to the general interests of the church of Christ.” Both parties will certainly acknowledge the propriety of this principle; but will both parties abide by its application?

The first point in favour of those who wish to “close this breach” between the Church and Wesleyan Methodism, is the absence of any irreconcilable difference in matters of doctrine; and what little difference does exist affects rather the *phraseology* than the substance. But when we arrive

at "Church Government," then commences the difficulty.

There are only two methods which have ever been proposed for effecting the object we have in view. The one, for the sake of distinction, may be termed the *Theory of Absorption*, and has been clearly explained; the other may be termed the *Theory of Union*, but every person who has mentioned it, has forgotten to state its "elements."

The theory of *Absorption* is certainly simple; but it has the fault of all theories which aim at simplicity without reference to the infinite complications of social existence. It is perfectly visionary and impracticable. The theory has been thus stated,—
 "Even our enemies must confess, that the clergy, at large, do preach the Gospel in its scriptural integrity to the people; and that there is *no ground accordingly for continuing a system (Methodism) which the present state of the religious world has entirely superseded.*"

Now look at the broad facts of the case. With a dense population destitute, to an unparalleled extent, of religious instruction, and amidst a vast superfecundity of socialism, chartism, and every demoralizing agency, this theory contemplates the disbanding of about *five thousand* Methodist ministers and preachers (Itinerant and Local) without any compensating increase of ministers on the part of the Establishment—the shutting up of *three thousand* chapels in England alone, besides other subordinate places of worship, with no corresponding

“ church-extension ” to meet the emergency — the withdrawing of *above a million* of “ hearers ” from the religious ordinances of their choice, with an absolute certainty that the very violence of the change would throw a vast proportion into the ranks of Dissent—the closing of between *three* and *four thousand* Sunday Schools in uneducated and populous districts, and the separation of *three hundred* and *sixty thousand* “ Members ” of the Society, from a discipline to which they are enthusiastically attached, without the provision of, or even indication of, any analogous system which might occupy its place ; to say nothing of a large field of Missionary operations which we are quite incompetent to cover.* No consistent and intelligent churchman, however desirous of theoretical unity and perfection, could even wish for such a consummation as this ; and to believe that any person could seriously propound such a theory, as a practicable theory, is certainly levying a large tax upon human credulity.

* “ Such a formal union (of the Methodists) with the Established Church as implies an abandonment of their own Ministry, and their peculiar form of discipline, would be equally a violation of Mr. Wesley’s design. Nor have the Methodist preachers any right so to trifle with the consciences of mankind as to withdraw from more than a million of people the religious ordinances and means of salvation which they prefer before all others. There are principles concerned in questions of this nature more deep and momentous than superficial declaimers ever imagine.”—*Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism*, by the Rev. T. Jackson, President of the Conference, 1839, p. 256.

But if this theory be impracticable, can no principles be laid down which may serve as a basis of *union*? But, here, care must be taken that those principles be consistent with our form of church-government; for, as it is justly observed by Mr. Jackson, "the church, with its three orders of ministers can never sanction the ordination which the Methodist preachers have received."* We have seen that a Presbyterian ordination was forced upon the Wesleyans more out of necessity than choice; that Mr. Wesley considered the "Episcopal form of Church-government as well agreeing with the writings and practice of the Apostles;"† that eminent writers of that body express "no objections to our Episcopacy scripturally understood,"‡ and we certainly wish it to be no *otherwise* understood.

In order then to preserve the uniformity of our Episcopal form of church-government, let us be permitted to clear away the difficulty by suggesting a slight extension. We propose, therefore, the creation of a "Wesleyan Bishop," who shall ordain the Wesleyan ministers, presenting themselves for ordination § at the annual Conference, and who

* Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism, p. 256.

† "Unless I see more reason for it than ever I yet saw, I will not leave the Church of England, *as by law established*, while the breath of God is in my nostrils." Wesley, (Jackson's Church and the Methodists, p. 26.)

‡ Watson's Life of Wesley.

§ At present the term "ordination" is not used by the Methodists; it is expressed by the phrase "received into full con-

shall exercise the other functions of Episcopacy as far as may be compatible with the discipline of Wesleyan Methodism as at present constituted. We propose further, that the nomination of this bishop be vested in the Wesleyan Conference,* and that the eligibility shall be restricted to such individuals as have filled the office of "President of the Conference;" not merely because this proviso would secure sufficient gravity and experience on the part of the individual selected, but would serve as a guarantee that such an individual possessed the affections and regard of the whole Methodist Body.† The *veto*, of course, would rest with the Archbishop of Canterbury; and, in case of its being exercised, we propose that the Conference proceed to the nomination of three individuals, belonging to the order specified. From these a selection will be made, and the appointment final.

nexion,"—another instance of the reluctance frequently manifested by Mr. Wesley, "to invade no man's right," on light, or, what he conceived, insufficient grounds.

* It consists of "one hundred senior preachers."

† There is one man whom we cannot pass over in silence. He has at all times acted in defence of the Church—opposing himself to every democratic tendency in the Body, and even co-operating with the Conference in the expulsion of a Methodist Itinerant preacher, who persisted, during the late crisis, in attaching himself to a "Church Reform Society" near Manchester. In this he executed the true Wesleyan principle. "As to those of the people called Methodists," observes Mr. Wesley, "whom you suppose to rail at and abuse the clergy,

This is the only concession we solicit at the hands of the church ; for it is impossible that we should co-operate with those whose ordination she does not sanction. Neither do we know of any interest of the Establishment, whether temporal or spiritual, that would suffer detriment from this relaxation. If we cannot extend the terms of our communion so far as to admit within the pale of the church all who do *not dissent from her doctrines and renounce her service* ; even rational men must at length begin to entertain doubts respecting her ultimate stability. When we reflect upon our singular position, the species of hostility which is constantly waged against us, and that, as a church, we have, at least, in bygone times, “ left undone those things which we ought to have done,” we are reminded of an observation which has fallen from a high authority : “ Permanent usages are suited to a peaceful state ; but those which are compelled to engage in vast

and to ‘ revile and censure their neighbours,’ I can only say, which are they ? Show me the men, and if it appear that any of those, under my care, habitually censure or revile others, whether CLERGY or Laity, I WILL MAKE THEM AN EXAMPLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL THE REST.” (Works, vol. viii. p. 489.) It is hardly necessary to state that DR. BUNTING is the individual to whom we allude, or that his manly proceedings in this case “ drew down upon him the obloquy of a licentious press.” If the “ reciprocity system” were insisted upon, where we might ask, would the “ Vicar of Gedney” appear ?

undertakings require a corresponding degree of inventive power.”*

At the hands of the Wesleyans we request the following concessions. In large towns and populous districts we have no desire to extort from them the closing of their chapels during the hours of service in the parochial church (unless on very special occasions;) for that would be inconsistent with the principles we have already advocated, (p. 24,)† as well as with the relaxation of Mr. Wesley himself. But in rural and thinly peopled districts, we would suggest the propriety of recurring, as far as circumstances will permit, to the practice of the founder of Methodism.

The next concession relates to the use of the “Liturgy.” It will be observed that the plan of pacification “*strongly recommended*” the use of the Liturgy. We wish this recommendation to be made “absolute.” On this head we have with us the suffrage of many eminent Wesleyans. “The

* Thucyd. lib. i. § 71.

† Wesleyan Methodism may put forward some claim to the peculiar honour of the Establishment as the “poor man’s church.” “Several of the chapels,” observes Mr. Jackson, “in the principal manufacturing towns, such as Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and Huddersfield, are of very large dimensions. In Leeds alone the chapels contain *four thousand free sittings*; and in many other places the spiritual necessities of the lower classes of society are met in the same liberal manner.”—*Centenary of Wesleyan Methodism*, p. 247.

fault," says Mr. Watson, "in the 'plan of pacification' lay in not making the use of the Liturgy the *sole* and *peremptory rule*, as a condition of opening their chapels during the hours of service. That improvement is indeed greatly to be desired; for the Liturgy *secures* the reading of a large portion of the Scriptures; it *secures* what Mr. Wesley has properly called the "four grand parts of public petition," (p. 64;) and besides the aid it affords to the most spiritual and devout, a great body of evangelical truth is by constant use laid up in the minds of children and ignorant people" "furnishing them with suitable, sanctifying, solemn, and impressive petitions." *

With respect to the administration of the sacrament, we wish to withdraw none of the privileges conceded in 1795. We propose, however, this concession, that "members of the Wesleyan Societies" shall attend the administration of this rite at the parochial church, at least *once a quarter*. This is the strongest bond of union that can subsist between us; it draws a strong line of demarcation, as Bishop Coplestone remarks, between the "Wesleyans and those organised communities" (of dissent) "which exclude from their society any that communicate in the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper with the national church." At the same time, it is a homage to

* Watson's Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley, p. 144, note.

the Establishment and to the memory of John Wesley, which, we are assured, no true Wesleyan will ever grudge.

Such are the principal concessions on the part of the Church of England and Wesleyan Methodism which have suggested themselves to our mind, in no light or inconsiderate mood, as forming a basis for their mutual *union*, and, subsequently, for their more effective co-operation. Whether any practical result may ever flow from these or similar suggestions, to re-unite us with our brethren, it would be in vain for the writer to conjecture. He has endeavoured to execute, to the best of his ability, what he conceives to be his part of the duty; and, if he only succeeds in making the question better understood by all parties, he will not consider his time misspent or his labour misapplied. Nothing would afford him greater pleasure than to see members of the Church of England reciprocate the same feeling towards the Wesleyan Methodists as one of their writers has evinced in the following passage towards us:—

“The prevalent sentiment of the Methodists, as a body, towards the Establishment has been that of friendship. We rejoice that she has great influence with the mass of the population. We wish her prosperity and perpetuity, as we wish all other Christian churches; and the *more so* as we recognise in her the ‘mother of us all,’ and can never contemplate, without the deepest admiration, her noble army of confessors and martyrs, and the illustrious train of

her divines, whose writings have been, and still continue to be, the light of Christendom.”*

* Watson's *Life of Mr. Wesley*, p. 361.

NOTE ON PAGE 20.

THE extent of the preceding observations leaves us no space for fulfilling our original intention, as expressed in the text. On the subject of the doctrines of Wesleyan Methodism we, therefore, refer to the authorised publications of the Connexion, namely, Mr. Wesley's "First Series of Sermons," and his "Notes on the New Testament." Extracts on this point may also be seen in "Dr. Warren's Chronicles of Methodism," vol. i. p. 4—40. For a *systematic* exposition of these doctrines, and for many valuable quotations from the "divines who continue to be the light of Christendom," quoted in explanation or support, we refer to "Watson's Theological Institutes." The polemical writings of the Vicar of Madeley (Fletcher's "Checks to Antinomianism") are well worthy of perusal on this head. Many valuable remarks on the doctrines, as well as the personal character and history of Mr. Wesley, will be found in "Watson's Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley." The two works ought, in fact, to be read in juxta-position. Authorities from the articles, homilies, and fathers, will be found in Mr. Wesley's "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion."—*Works*, vol. viii.

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